

How to Handle Difficult Parents: a teacher's survival guide

By Suzanne Capek Tingley

Presented by Amanda McRary

Pinocchio's Mom

- Despite the mounting evidence, her child never lies.
- Pinocchio knows his mom will believe him so he spins his version of the truth to her before the teacher can get to her.

Tips:

- Don't use sarcasm.
- Stick to the facts: Who, what, where, when, how, why
- Speaking directly to the student will often force the student to admit what they did wrong.
- Don't get sucked into the "Are you calling my child a liar?" discussion. Stick with "We're trying to find out exactly what happened here."

Caped Crusader

- Wants to know exactly what his child is learning and how.
- Believes his ideas and principles should be embraced by everyone.
- Wants to influence the practices in your classroom with his beliefs.
- Often refers to "we" or "parents" being the ones with the problems.

Tips:

- Parents have a right to review what their child is learning. Don't take their objections personally.
- Ask questions to clarify exactly who has the problem and exactly what the problem is.
- Be proactive and alert parents to assignments that may be controversial.
- If problems persist, refer the Crusader to your principal.

Ms. "Quit Picking on My Kid"

- Insists that all the kids are doing the same inappropriate behaviors as her child.
- Feels like you are singling out her child.
- If you punish the whole class, hers will be the only one who *didn't* deserve it.

Tips:

- Use the broken record technique to emphasize the message.
- Don't be drawn into a battle.
- Explain how this behavior could be problematic if multiplied by many students.
- Insist that parents define their terms. What do they mean by "picking on"?
- Don't get drawn into "no I don't" "yes you do" conversations.

The Intimidator

- Does not treat the teacher as an equal.
- Puts all of the responsibility on the teacher and none on the child.
- Calls the teacher by his or her first name as a means of intimidation.
- Often is "very busy" and wants to rush through the conference.

Tips:

- Start out calling a parent by their last name, but if they switch to first names, you should do so as well to keep yourselves equal.
- Cut to the chase: explain what the problem is and what actions you have taken to correct the child's behavior.
- Tell the parent specifically what you want him to do to help fix the situation.
- Try not to take an irate phone call at the end of the day. Wait and call them back in the morning.
- Don't give parents your home number – keep the line between personal and professional clear.
- If a parent threatens to go to the principal, school board, or worse, your response should be "You need to do what you think is right."



The Stealth Zapper

- Seems supportive, but gently implies that you aren't doing a good job.
- Uses flattery or criticism to achieve some advantage for her child.
- May insult your colleagues while praising you.

Tips:

- Be careful not to accept her insinuations, especially about colleagues.
- Stick to responses about colleagues that are positive or neutral.
- Don't spend any more time with the Stealth Zapper than absolutely necessary.

Helicopter Mom

- Hovers constantly, ready to whisk away any problem or inconvenience that may come to her child.
- At her child's beck and call.
- Spends a lot of time at school and/or on the phone.
- May also involve herself in the matters of other students.

Tips:

- Insist that her child play by the same rules as other children.
- Communicate expectations clearly.
- Refuse to be drawn into comparisons between your students.
- Be careful not to share confidential information about other students no matter how hard she pries.

